

7 steps to prevent burnout in your practice

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Physicians have been hearing a lot about burnout and how it can lead to cynicism, negative attitudes toward patients, exhaustion and the desire to quit practicing medicine. The good news is that you can make changes in your practice to reduce your risk of burnout—learn how.

A free online module, part of the AMA's STEPS Forward website, shows you how to measure and respond to burnout in your practice. Follow these seven steps:

- **Establish wellness as a quality indicator** - Burnout has a broad-reaching impact—on physicians, patients, the quality of care delivered and practice finances. Encourage your practice to establish physician wellness as a quality indicator that is regularly measured. The module has information about why preventing burnout should be a priority for your practice.
- **Start a wellness committee or choose a wellness champion** - A wellness committee made up of clinicians (doctors, nurses and physician assistants) as well as administrators (finance and management staff) should work with organizational leaders on the issue. If you have a solo or small practice, a wellness champion may be a better option. The champion should be an individual in the organization who promotes the use of wellness resources and models positive behaviors. The module includes talking points for discussing this idea with practice leaders.
- **Distribute an annual wellness survey** - The 10-item Zero Burnout Program survey, often called the “mini Z,” is short and easy to use. Distribute the survey annually to all clinicians in your practice. The mini Z can be completed individually online (use the module to access the link) or printed out.
- **Meet regularly with leaders to discuss data and interventions** - The wellness committee or wellness champion can use the data from the mini Z to inform practice improvements and identify areas of greatest concern. The module offers ways to share the data and explains how to address naysayers who may not believe burnout matters.
- **Initiate selected interventions** - Your practice can prioritize and select interventions to address burnout where it exists, from work flow redesign to better communication to quality

improvement projects. The module includes extensive information about each of these three areas, examples of interventions and tactics to reduce burnout.

Repeat the survey to re-evaluate the situation - Compare stress and burnout scores from before and after any interventions. Develop an understanding of what worked and celebrate the successes, but don't forget to examine aspects that remain unchanged or increased their contribution to burnout after the interventions.

Seek answers within data, refine the interventions and continue improvements - Once you determine what's working, refocus on those interventions and reinvigorate staff to carry them out. The commitment of the wellness committee or champion can help convince clinicians that your practice is dedicated to staying on the path to improvement.

Remember—change is slow and steady. Small improvements can make a big difference in the day-to-day work lives of physicians, so don't be discouraged if you can't make big changes right away.

Read real-world stories in the module from physicians who implemented small improvements in their practices and saw big results. You also can find information about how to get support for intervention implementation. The module offers continuing medical education credit.

Here's how to learn more

- Visit the STEPS Forward website to see the current modules.
- Check out upcoming live STEPS Forward events.
- Sign up to be notified when new modules and events are available.